A New Approach to Business Problems

When I arrived at the Warner Center Marriott in Woodland Hills for the Dog and Pony show that Lotus was putting on, I didn't expect to actually *see* the software that would dramatically improve the way my business operates. I expected to learn a little more about Windows databases, eat some disgusting food and leave with a T-shirt and a cap...that would go into the closet with the other T-shirts and caps I've collected at similar events.

I left with was a copy of Lotus Approach version 3.0, and a curiosity to see if it would do all the things it did in the demonstration on *my* machine. It did....and more!

Lotus Approach 3.0 is the easiest Windows database I have seen to date. It allows even a relative novice to develop impressive looking forms, worksheets and reports, as well as create intelligent, related databases in a very short period of time. Macro buttons, variables and calculated fields are no problem. Powerful searches and semi-automated data entry are just a few mouse clicks away.

Unfortunately, all of this power and ease leaves you craving more. After developing a simple application with Approach, I set about on a more ambitious product...and I quickly discovered where the walls were. I make a list each day of questions to ask Tech Support on my next call. Currently I call about three times a week, and each cleared hurdle invariably leads me to new ones. The Lotus Tech Support is very good, which is more than I can say for the manual , which is woefully inadequate! Any program with this many features and capabilities needs more than just a smallish, only an inch and a half thick, User's Manual to guide you through the various funtions. This is further complicated by the fact that there seem to be very few third party books written about Approach. Luckily I was able to find a copy of "Using Approach 3.0 for Windows" but it took some searching.

So here I sit, some five weeks after installing Approach, I've started using my new WonderApp in day-to-day use. I've almost completely replaced my old Personal Information Manager by creating my own phone book, merging my mailing list into it and creating links to parts lists, order screens, contact worksheets and call records. With a mouse click I can get a list of times the client has called me, record a new call, record an order or look up the person who referred them to me. I can check product pricing, back-order status or quickly find the tech support number of the vendor. There are still some rough edges to my new WonderApp and it doesn't have much in the way of calendaring capability (I still use Ecco for that), but it sure has made a big difference in my

productivity. All in all it has condensed the tasks I used to do with three or four applications into a single one, giving me complete control over the look, feel, and operation of that application.

I also *love* being able to quickly and easily import other database or mailing lists useful to me without the usual formatting headaches.

It's made a big difference in the way I feel about my computer, as well. Now that I'm managing, resorting and searching across a 10,000 record GUI database a several times a minute I'm finding my 486BL3X-75 somewhat lacking. I envy my client who just installed a Pentium-90 file server and have been eyeing my checkbook to see if I can afford to boost my RAM up to 16 Megs. A SCSI hard drive/host adapter and a motherboard upgrade are probably waiting in the wings, and I can practically taste the productivity.

Approach has so many possibilities; my next project is to investigate how well it will work with Ami Pro, my word processor of choice, and perhaps, Lotus Organizer.

Approach is first rate and, for me at least, a full blown success! Furthermore, it's starting to pay for itself. Later this week I'm meeting with two different clients to investigate the possibility of writing some custom applications for them using Approach. If all goes well I'll have that new Pentium by Easter!

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